



ANNUAL REVIEW

SERVING NATURE AND YOU

FISCAL YEAR JULY 1, 2023-JUNE 30, 2024



For the Missouri Department of Conservation, it's hard to discuss this past year without recognizing it was a year of leadership transition with the retirement of Director Sara Parker Pauley. As a native Missourian and dedicated conservation professional, it is incredibly humbling to have been asked by the Conservation Commission to serve as the 10th director in the 87-year history of MDC. While my appointment as director means different leadership for the agency, I remain committed to continuing to build on the agency's mission to conserve Missouri's fish, forest, and wildlife resources while providing opportunities for all Missourians to learn about and enjoy the exceptional outdoor resources that exist in this great state.

This *Annual Review* highlights the continued commitment to strengthen partnerships with local communities, conservation groups, and other stakeholders as MDC works to address emerging issues and highlight innovative conservation programs, from landscape restoration efforts to educational

initiatives and community engagement. The MDC team continues to work tirelessly to ensure that Missouri's fish, forest, and wildlife resources remain a cornerstone of the state's heritage. As we look back on 2024, we celebrate the collaborative efforts of our dedicated staff, passionate volunteers, and engaged citizens who play a vital role in advancing conservation. Together, we've made strides in addressing critical issues such as grassland conservation, reduction of invasive species like feral hogs and invasive carp, expanded turkey hunting opportunities, improved wetland and aquatic habitats, and enhanced citizen engagement in the outdoors.

I look forward to this new year, continuing to work together to meet new opportunities and challenges together.

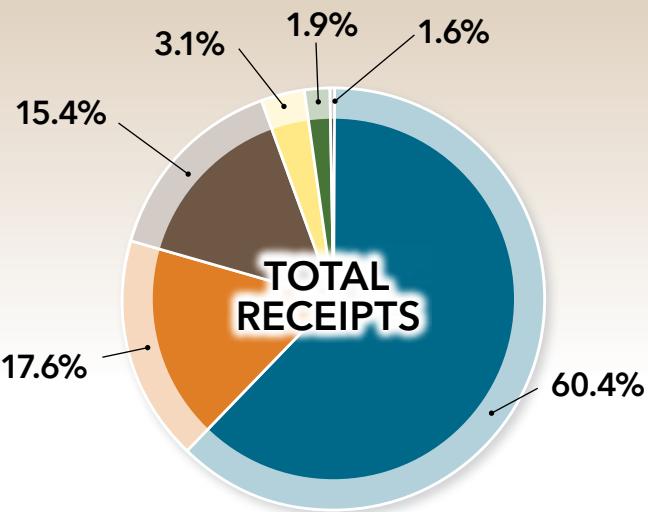
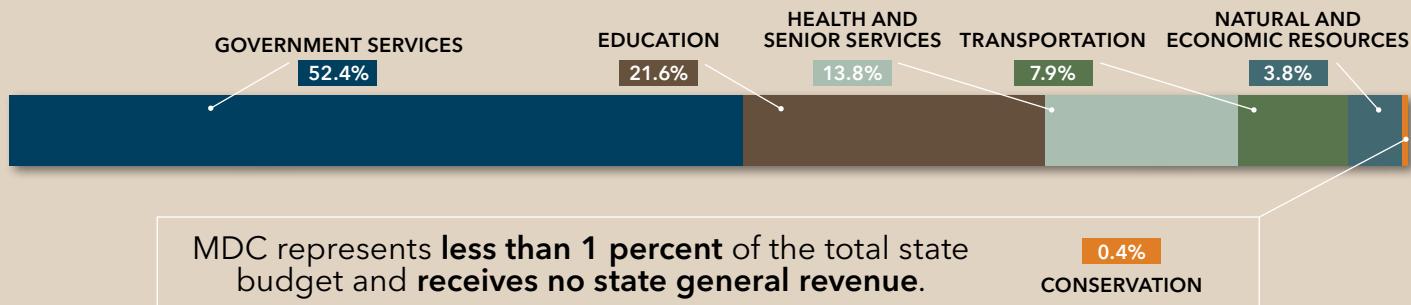

JASON SUMNERS, DIRECTOR



Director Sumners assists with lake sturgeon tagging efforts on the Osage River in 2024.

STATE OF MISSOURI OPERATING BUDGET

TOTAL FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024: \$51,846,462,544



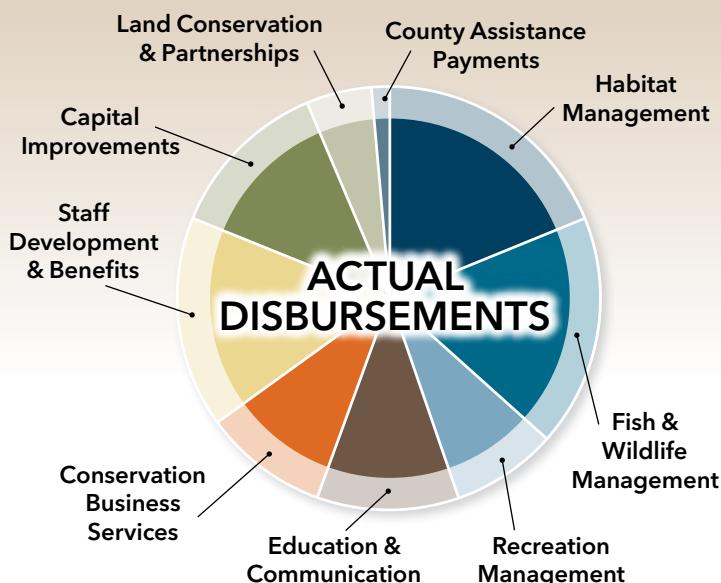
MDC FY24 Actual Receipts

MDC gets the majority of its funding through the **conservation sales tax**. For every \$8 spent on taxable items, one penny goes to conservation.

■ Conservation Sales Tax.....	\$171,373,787
■ Federal Reimbursements.....	\$49,962,639
■ Permit Sales.....	\$43,575,289
■ Sales and Rentals.....	\$8,798,203
■ Interest.....	\$5,376,805
■ Other Sources.....	\$4,426,119

NOTE: Disbursements include all operating, other agency, and capital improvements from the Conservation Commission Fund. Other agency disbursements are appropriated outside the Department of Conservation operating budget. Fuel, benefits, and other disbursements were allocated to the appropriate branches.

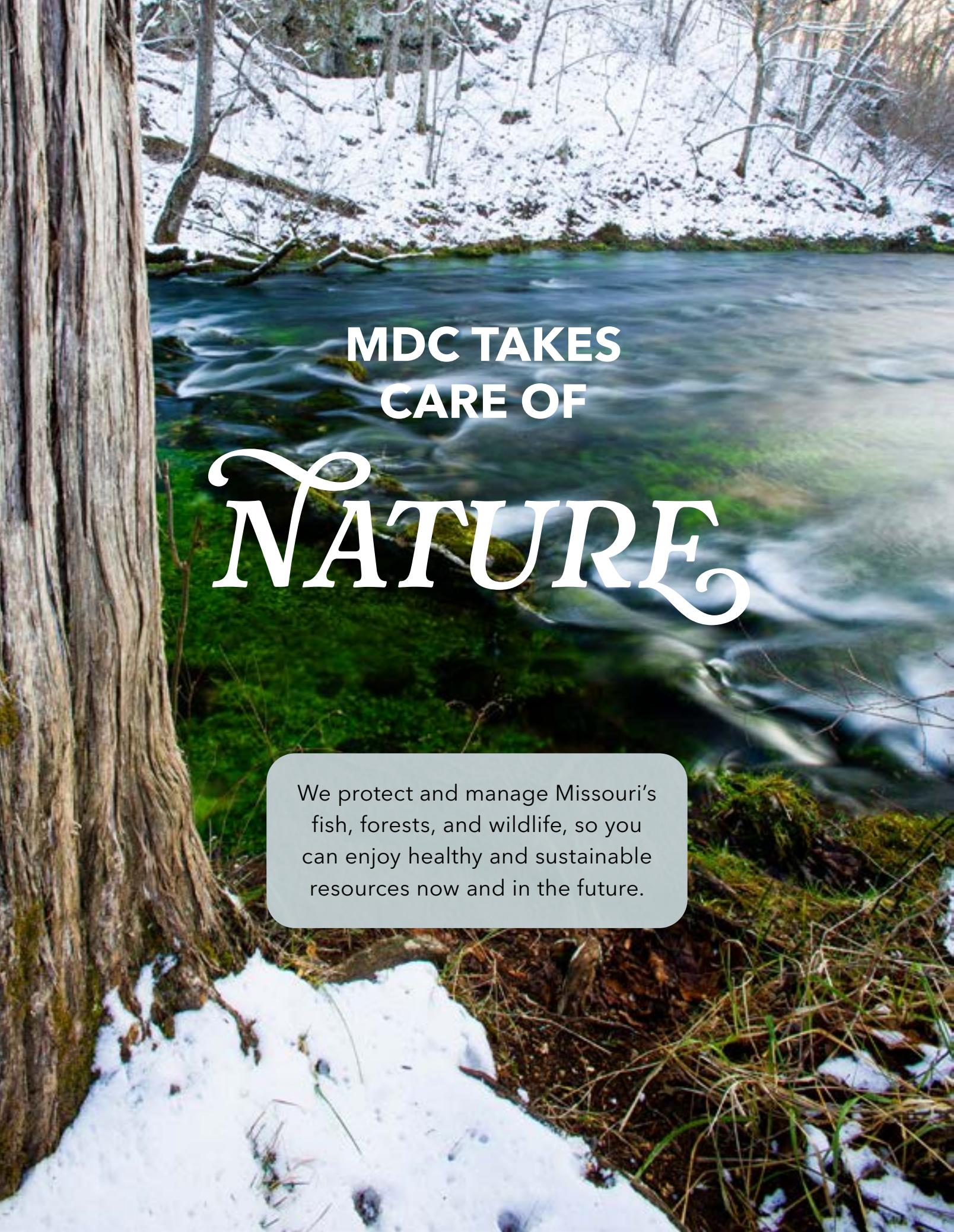
OPERATING BUDGET SOURCE: Missouri Office of Administration



MDC FY24 Actual Disbursements

Funds are distributed throughout MDC to accomplish the **state's top conservation priorities**.

■ Habitat Management.....	\$58,793,588
■ Fish & Wildlife Management.....	\$54,640,891
■ Recreation Management	\$24,053,649
■ Education & Communication.....	\$33,980,185
■ Conservation Business Services	\$28,899,393
■ Staff Development & Benefits.....	\$49,316,194
■ Capital Improvements.....	\$37,984,268
■ Land Conservation & Partnerships.....	\$15,939,705
■ County Assistance Payments.....	\$3,567,214



MDC TAKES CARE OF NATURE

We protect and manage Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife, so you can enjoy healthy and sustainable resources now and in the future.

Community Assistance Program

Since 1980, MDC has partnered with local communities through the Community Assistance Program (CAP) to provide close-to-home fishing opportunities in communities throughout the state. CAP has 183 public lakes, 27 stream accesses, three lake accesses, eight aquatic resource education ponds, and 115 partners, with four new partners added this year including the communities of Cleveland, Waynesville, Washington, and Warsaw. CAP lakes managed by MDC biologists total 10,548 acres. Additionally, the department provides CAP partners with grants to construct fishing and boating access facilities. Two infrastructure projects were completed in Bonne Terre and Cape Girardeau.



Top: In the spring of 2024, a grand opening ceremony was held at Bonne Terre City Lake. The project included a new concrete sidewalk, fishing platform, and a floating fishing dock. The project was implemented through an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Grant as part of CAP.

Right: Capaha Park Lake, located in Cape Girardeau, was the site of a grand opening following a project that included a lake renovation, underwater fish habitat structures and spawning habitat, two forebays, boardwalk and fishing pier meeting Americans with Disabilities Act standards, four fishing plaza access points, an aeration system, and a boat slide. The project was funded by an Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Grant grant as part of CAP. Attendees included Parks and Recreation Director Doug Gannon, Mayor Stacy Kinder, Public Works Director Casey Brunke, MDC Fisheries Programs Supervisor Laura Ruman, and MDC Fisheries Biologist Salvador Mondragon.



Aquatic Organism Passage

Guided by the Southeast Aquatic Resource Partnership, MDC co-led, with The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the formation of a statewide Missouri Stream Connectivity Partnership (MO SCP) to address removing aquatic organism passage barriers in streams. Partners in MO SCP include county commissions and road crews, Missouri Department of Transportation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, universities, Conservation Federation of Missouri, Stream Teams United, The Land Learning Foundation, American Rivers, United States Army Corps of Engineers, United States Forest Service, National Parks Service, United States Geological Survey, Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation, Fort Leonard Wood, H2Ozarks, and Midwest Waters Initiative. The partnership is open to all interested agencies and nongovernmental organizations. In 2024, Crawford County, with the assistance of the MO SCP, was able to secure nearly \$1.5 million in federal funds from a bi-partisan infrastructure law to complete two bridge replacements with aquatic organism friendly crossings that are also safer for drivers, provide more reliable access, and require less maintenance. The new bridges will open 25 miles of Huzzah Creek to a variety of aquatic species, including threatened and endangered mussels and the eastern hellbender.

Fish Passage and Transportation Improvements

Through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Fish Passage Program, MDC staff secured grants to work with Dallas and Moniteau county commissions over the past year to coordinate replacement of low-water stream crossings. The partnership with Dallas County Commission is made possible by a \$370,000 grant to focus on a low-water replacement in the Little Niangua River Priority Geography on Simpson Road. This is the 17th low water crossing replaced in the Niangua River watershed of Dallas, Hickory, and Camden counties to benefit the federally threatened Niangua darter. In addition, through grant funding of \$370,000, local staff worked in partnership with the Moniteau County Commission to replace a low-water stream crossing in the Upper Moniteau Creek Priority Watershed on Mount Vernon Road. This is the third low-water crossing that local staff have worked on with Moniteau and Cooper counties to benefit the federally endangered Topeka shiner. These collaborative projects between county, state, and federal governments reach the common goals of providing safe, cost effective, and reliable stream crossings while also protecting aquatic life by reconnecting aquatic habitat and improving stream stability.



Aquatic Habitat Program

A fish habitat structure improvement project grant kept fisheries biologists busy from the fall of 2022 to the spring of 2024. Bass Pro Shops partnered with Beyond the Pond, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and MDC to provide approximately \$200,000 to improve fish habitat in Table Rock Lake and Bull Shoals Lake. The goal was to make these two great fishing reservoirs even better. For the average angler, the size of a large impoundment may seem overwhelming. Many anglers ask, "Where should I start fishing?" On the other hand, the avid angler may also have some preferred structures that tend to hold sportfish year-round and know exactly where to go each fishing trip. In both scenarios, these fish habitat structure waypoints, found on MDC's website or the MO Fishing App, are at the top of the list of places to go. Biologists also acknowledge these brush piles serve multiple and important roles for fish populations. These structures provide nursery habitat and protective cover for young fish and attract large, predatory sport-fish species, such as crappie and bass, for the angler to pursue.

A total of 751 habitat structures were improved or newly built in Table Rock Lake and 60 large habitat structures were improved



or newly built in Bull Shoals Lake. This project builds upon a long-standing public/private partnership in the Missouri Ozarks to improve and restore fish habitat dating as far back as 2007. Since then, multiple grant projects have resulted in the creation of over 2,250 fish habitat structures on these two reservoirs combined. This most recent grant project has provided an excellent opportunity to maintain and enhance fish habitat for two of the Midwest's most popular sport fisheries. The work that has been accomplished on these projects has served as a national example of sustaining and improving reservoir sport fish populations through large-scale habitat improvements.

The GPS locations for these sites can be found on the MDC website at mdc.mo.gov/fishing/where-fish.

ABOVE: MDC staff, along with staff and leaders from the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, showcased their finished fish habitat structure projects and habitat barges with former MDC Director Sara Parker Pauley, Bass Pro Shop's director of conservation (the primary donor), and the National Fish Habitat Partnership's national director in attendance.

INSET: The Table Rock Barge in 2008.

Staff and partners have submitted grant applications to tackle two more lake habitat projects at Harry S. Truman Reservoir and Mark Twain Lake.

Staff and partners are improving stream habitat in Missouri as well. Six large projects have been completed in fiscal year 2024 — one for stream bank stabilization, one for riparian zone reforestation, two for livestock exclusion from the riparian zone, one for livestock exclusion and alternate watering sources, and one bridge replacement for safety and free aquatic animal passage.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: Former MDC Director Sara Parker Pauley assists with the 2024 spring paddlefish spawning activities.

MIDDLE: One of the Lost Valley Hatchery stocking trucks was wrapped with eye-catching graphics. This is the first of many trucks from different hatcheries scheduled for wrapping.

BOTTOM: Construction of the intermediate field tanks at Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery were completed by the end of summer.

Hatchery System Updates

Supporting Urban Fishing

Lost Valley Fish Hatchery supports the Urban Fishing Program (UFP) by providing in-house reared channel catfish from April through September every year. Staff perform 20 stocking trips during this time frame to keep these UFP lakes supplied with catchable size fish as they are managed as put-and-take fisheries. In total, there are 31 lakes in Kansas City and St. Louis that are stocked with 81,000 of these channel catfish. The shift to “in-house” production was made possible by renovation projects, infrastructure upgrades, and a reduction in the requested size from 14-inch to 12-inch-long fish.

Warmwater

Channel Catfish

- Channel catfish broodstock were prepared for breeding and paired to 48 pens.
- Spawning resulted in 75 pounds of channel catfish eggs collected.
- In total, there were 626,000 channel catfish fry kept for grow-out.
- Fingerlings were distributed to all four warmwater hatcheries.

Walleye

- Over 12 million eggs were taken between Lost Valley and Chesapeake hatcheries and set in the hatching batteries for incubation.
- Fry were distributed to all four warmwater hatcheries to meet statewide walleye fingerling requests for this lake strain of 1,576,660 walleye.

Lake Sturgeon

- Lost Valley received 85,800 fertilized lake sturgeon eggs from Genoa National Fish Hatchery in Wisconsin.

Striped Bass

- Lost Valley received 250,000 striped bass fry to set into rearing ponds for grow-out.

Hybrid Striped Bass

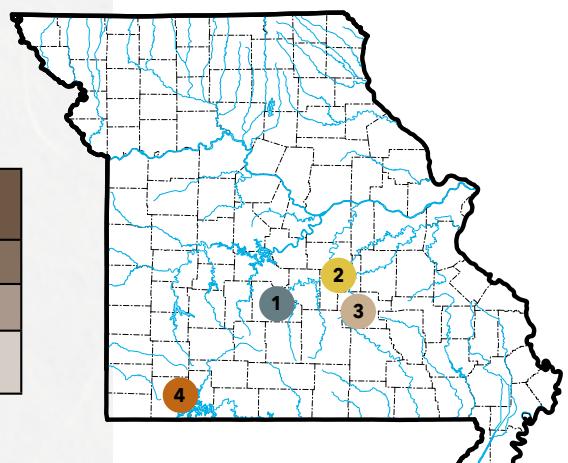
- Lost Valley received and set 1.65 million hybrid striped bass fry into rearing ponds for grow-out.

Paddlefish

- Spawning efforts at the hatchery located at Blind Pony Lake Conservation Area (CA) resulted in 2.1 million paddlefish eggs collected.
- 750,000 paddlefish fry were set into rearing ponds in Blind Pony Lake CA for grow-out.

Tank Wrap

- Lost Valley's 5-ton stocking truck was wrapped this spring.
- While it transports a wide variety of fish species, it stocks channel catfish in urban Kansas City and St. Louis lakes from April through September.



Coldwater

Trout Park Fishing Tag Sales

Trout Park	Bennett Spring	Maramec Spring	Montauk	Roaring River	Total
2024	128,553	46,613	88,011	111,819	374,996
2023	130,848	43,810	87,162	106,069	367,889
Percentage +/-	-1.75%	+6.40%	+0.97%	+5.42%	+1.93%

State Record Fish Program

Missouri is blessed with many lakes and streams that provide world-class angling opportunities. MDC developed the State Record Fish Program to recognize anglers who have caught the largest recorded fish from a list of recognized species found in Missouri waters.

Skipjack Herring

Angler: Anthony Rozniak

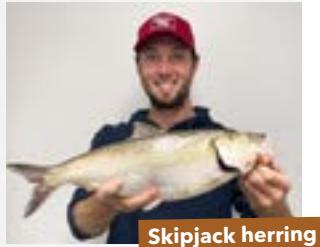
Date: Dec. 6, 2023

Weight: 3 lbs. (Ties current state record)

Caught from: Missouri River

Method: Pole and line

Previous record: There is now a three-way tie with a 2019 catch from the Osage River and a 2017 fish from the Missouri River.



Yellow Perch

Angler: Jeffrey Needles

Date: Jan. 3, 2024

Weight: 12 oz.

Caught from: Lake Lotawana

Method: Throwline

Previous record: 10 oz., private pond, May 11, 2019



Paddlefish

Angler: Chad Williams, Olathe, KS

Date: March 17, 2024

Weight: 164 lbs., 13 oz.

Caught from:

Lake of the Ozarks

Method: Snagging

Previous state record:

140 lbs., 10 oz., Lake of the Ozarks, March 18, 2022

Previous world record:

164 lbs., Keystone Lake, OK, June 2021



Paddlefish

Bighead Carp

Angler: George Chance

Date: March 19, 2024

Weight: 97 lbs.

Caught from: Mississippi River

Method: Pole and line

Previous state record:

80 lbs., Lake of the Ozarks, Oct. 9, 2004

Previous world record:

90 lbs., Guntersville Lake, TN, June 2005



Bighead carp

George O. White State Forest Nursery Celebrates 90 Years

The George O. White State Forest Nursery has placed millions of trees on the state's landscape since it began in 1934, and it celebrated its 90th anniversary on April 6, 2024, with a public open house. Staff conducted tours that provided insight into the science and technology needed to produce more than 2 million seedlings that are allocated annually to meet public and private tree needs around the state. People also had the opportunity to learn how seeds are processed for planting and how 70 species of trees are grown at the nursery. Other events that day included a fishing clinic at the nursery lake and the opportunity to see the portable sawmill in operation.

The state nursery raises trees for forestry projects on public and private lands, but much of the facility's focus has shifted to serving the tree needs of Missouri's citizens. Today, approximately 2.25 million seedlings grown at the 100-acre nursery are allocated to public and private needs around Missouri and elsewhere. Many of these seedlings go to Missouri landowners who want to improve habitat on their land. MDC's annual tree seedling sales run from Sept. 1–May 1. This popular program allows landowners to purchase bundles of seedling trees from the nursery. Bundle sizes vary, depending on the purpose of the planting, but most range between 10 and 25 plants. The nursery also collects thousands of pounds of seed each year, much of which is purchased from the public.

MDC Maintains Sustainable Forestry Initiative® Certification

Over 670,000 acres of Missouri's conservation areas have been certified by one of the world's most recognized forest management standards, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI).

SFI certification is based on principles, performance measures, and indicators built through a collaborative effort from not only the forest sector, but also resource professionals, conservation groups, academics, brand owners, landowners, and governments. The scope of the program is to balance environmental, social, and economic objectives, which include in part conservation of wildlife habitat and biological diversity; sustainably harvesting forest products; protecting water quality and special sites; providing training and education of employees, landowners, and contractors; and providing recreational opportunities.

Successfully maintaining SFI certification makes MDC a sustainability leader. Working together, SFI and MDC can broaden the practice of responsible forestry and expand the connection between forests and communities. Certification helps make a link between well-managed forests and the public benefits that affect all of us every day.

As part of its certification, MDC is required to undergo annual surveillance audits as well as full certification to the SFI Forest Management Standard every five years. The audits are conducted by an independent, accredited third party certification body.

Prescribed Fire

Approximately 42 million acres of Missouri land are privately owned outside the jurisdiction of any state or federal agencies. Recognizing the benefits of prescribed fire when applied to the landscape, MDC works with several nongovernmental organizations and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to provide grant funding and services for interested landowners. Through FY24, MDC was able to provide prescribed burning equipment to five Prescribed Burn Cooperatives. The equipment was provided by the USFS Eastern Region's State, Private, and Tribal Forestry, Bipartisan Infrastructure grant program. In addition to providing this equipment grant, MDC offers Prescribed Burning for Missouri Land Managers, a prescribed burn workshop for private landowners. This workshop involves online course requirements and a field exercise where participants meet with fire professionals. Once a landowner completes the course, they are recognized and certified as a prescribed burn manager. Since May 2024, MDC staff have hosted 92 field exercises and certified 2,286 private landowners.

Volunteer Fire Assistance

Through an annual Volunteer Fire Assistance grant program, MDC awarded \$582,537 to 125 rural fire departments to purchase personal protective equipment, communications equipment, and wildfire/structural fire suppression equipment in FY24. This grant opportunity is provided primarily through a partnership MDC maintains with the USFS Eastern Region's State, Private, and Tribal Forestry.

Wildfire

Going into FY24, Missouri was experiencing effects of drought conditions, which continued through May. Missouri received significant rainfall in June, relieving most of the drought conditions. Before rainfall arrived, MDC staff and partnering fire departments experienced several days of significant fire weather, including periods of high winds, leading to more and larger wildfires. Through FY24, Missouri experienced 1,582 wildfires, affecting 33,482 acres of the state's landscape.

Heavy smoke was reported in the Current River Valley on March 24, and the source was discovered as a wildfire in the middle of Sunklands Natural Area, which was spreading quickly due to the rugged remote landscape and intense weather. MDC staff — including 14 crew members, four fire dozers, a Pioneer Forest staff member — and local volunteer firefighters responded and fought the fire until dawn. Due to this teamwork, the fire was contained at 2,633 acres with many structures saved and damage to sensitive natural communities minimized.



SUSAN FARRINGTON

Schell-Osage Conservation Area Wetland and Lake Renovation

MDC held a groundbreaking ceremony April 24, 2023, for a \$6.4 million pump station project at the Schell-Osage CA in northeastern Vernon County. The pump project was completed in July 2024. This is the first of three phases in a long-planned wetland and lake renovation. The project will improve the area's wetlands for a wide variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, and it will improve Schell Lake for fishing. These changes will enhance opportunities for waterfowl hunters, birders, wildlife watchers, and anglers.

Schell-Osage CA was developed along the Osage River and is one of MDC's oldest wetland and upland conservation areas. But much has changed since wetland development began in 1962 and wetland pools were opened to managed waterfowl hunting in 1964. Schell-Osage CA lowlands are now in the upper end of Truman Lake. Extreme weather and high-water levels within Truman Lake have caused repetitive, and therefore expensive, flood damage to area levees. Not all the change has been negative, though, because being adjacent to Truman Lake provides access to a much larger water source than when the area was first developed.

The permanent concrete pump station will draw water from the Osage River arm of Truman Lake. This source replaces water from Schell Lake and Atkinson Lake as well as portable pumps into Truman Lake, which were less efficient, safe, and reliable. The pump station will give area managers better control to fill wetland pools during autumn and spring waterfowl migrations, and it will reduce water level fluctuations in Schell and Atkinson lakes.

In coming phases, a redesign and rebuild of wetland levees will be at angles more in line with natural hydrology. They will use natural high points as anchors and be built with natural contours less prone to damage from flowing floodwater. The number of waterfowl hunting positions will be retained, and the new concrete hunting blinds will be built into mounds that will blend better into the landscape and can also function as habitat for wildlife.

Schell Lake will be renovated. The project will create more water depth diversity to enhance fishery habitat. An improved boat ramp and new jetties around the perimeter will increase access for bank anglers.



Grassland at Dunn Ranch

2024 Missouri Native Grasslands Summit

Grassland habitats in Missouri are critically important to many suites of species and are declining in most parts of the state. The first ever Missouri Native Grasslands Summit was held April 9–11 in Jefferson City and was hosted by MDC, the Conservation Federation of Missouri, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The objective for the summit was to increase participants' knowledge of grasslands, build relationships, and continue building partnerships to advance grassland conservation for diverse fish

and wildlife resources and for production of forage. The summit was for state and federal agency staff, public and private grassland researchers, agricultural producers, managers, not-for-profit and nongovernmental organizations, hunters, birders, and any conservationist interested in helping shape the future of grassland conservation in Missouri. Over 350 people attended to hear presentations and discussions from a wide variety of experts, professionals, agricultural producers, and other interested parties on the state of grassland conservation in Missouri.

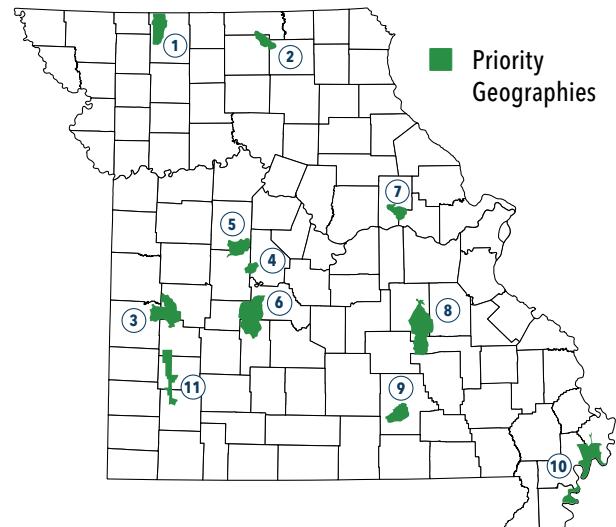
Missouri Comprehensive Conservation Strategy

In FY23, MDC reestablished the Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (CCS) working group, which provides guidance to CCS implementation. This committee is comprised of a diverse group of staff from a wide variety of disciplines within the department. In FY24, the CCS working group continued while the department created the Landscape Assessment and Monitoring Strategic Initiative, which focuses resources on developing tools to assess and monitor the effectiveness of conservation actions within priority geographies. This work is being accomplished by developing achievable and desired future conditions using the Missouri River Hills, located north of the Missouri River between Jefferson City and St. Louis, as a pilot and implementing a baseline landscape health index for each

priority geography in the coming years. These efforts will assist teams and partners in further determining where and what types of activities to focus on to help improve the habitat quality at a landscape scale.

Missouri now has 11 priority geographies, adding the Golden Grasslands during FY24. Golden Grasslands is located within Cedar, Dade, and Lawrence counties, encompassing a key portion of the Golden Grasslands Conservation Opportunity Area. This area contains many critically imperiled remnant prairies and plant and animal species of conservation concern. Focused work in this area is resulting in improved native grasslands and livestock forage on public and private working lands. Within each of the 11 priority geographies, dedicated interdisciplinary teams continue to work with partner organizations and private landowners to implement landscape scale conservation.

MISSOURI PRIORITY GEOGRAPHIES



1. Grand River Grasslands
2. Spring Creek Watershed
3. Upper Osage Grasslands
4. Big Buffalo Creek
5. Hi Lonesome
6. Little Niangua River
7. Missouri River Hills
8. Shoal Creek Woodlands
9. Mahan's Creek
10. River Bends
11. Golden Grasslands

Missouri Natural Areas System and Natural Community Management Evaluation

Missouri continues to manage a strong natural areas program under the guidance of the Missouri Natural Areas Committee (MoNAC). This year, MoNAC approved nomination of Bennett Spring Savanna Natural Area, owned by The Nature Conservancy, and expansions of MDC's Paint Brush Prairie and Weldon Spring Hollow natural areas. These areas are outstanding examples of savanna, woodland, prairie, and forest natural communities in conservation opportunity areas and a priority geography.

Department staff organized a glade and woodland restoration workshop and a Natural Communities 101 workshop with over 50 department staff participating.

In cooperation with the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF), University of Missouri, and department natural history biologists, community health index models (CHI) were completed for Ozark oak, pine-oak, and glade natural community groups. Results from sampling pine-oak CHIs were shared at the Shortleaf Pine Summit in July 2023 and at the 2024 Missouri Natural Resources Conference. A report on ecological monitoring for the MTNF Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project using CHIs was published in February 2024.

Department staff along with the Natural Areas Association and Kansas City Wildlands hosted a stewardship in action workshop in Kansas City for 25 participants from a variety of states and agencies/organizations in August 2023.

Feral Hog Elimination

As a member of the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership, MDC has joined 14 other federal and state agencies, as well as agriculture and conservation nongovernmental organizations, to eliminate feral hogs from public and private lands throughout Missouri. In 2020, the partnership established a unified incident command system to manage feral hog elimination in the state. Since 2016, the partnership has eliminated feral hogs from 269 watersheds in the state. These watersheds cover approximately 6.7 million acres, a decrease of 60 percent of

Invasive Species and Disease

The Invasive Species Program provides coordination and strategic guidance to department branches, collaboration with partners, and communication and education to the public. The Invasive Species Working Group is an assemblage of agency specialists representing a diversity of invasive species related expertise. The group serves to provide strategic guidance within MDC and address invasive species related needs and challenges. In FY24, the working group began developing best management practices for prevention document, and provided reviews for outreach materials, novel equipment permits for invasive carp removal, and regulation changes related to invasive species.

The Invasive Species Program collaborates with partners across the state and region, including Missouri Invasive Plant Council, Missouri Invasive Forest Pest Council, Invasive Species Strike Teams, Scenic Rivers Invasive Species Partnership, Mississippi River Basin Panel, and others, to promote awareness and implementation of effective management and conservation efforts that protect healthy land, water, and forests on public and private lands in Missouri.

Public outreach and education on an array of invasive species topics were provided through a variety of formats and outlets including quarterly articles in *Missouri Conservationist*, presentations to volunteer groups including Master Naturalists, social media posts, the annual Invasive Species Day Event at the Missouri State Fair, and production of nine invasive species outreach videos in collaboration with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Invasive Carp Removal

In September 2023, MDC, in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, conducted an invasive carp removal on the lower Grand River in northwest Missouri. Intensive efforts using commercial nets and electrified fish capture equipment resulted in over 19 tons of invasive carp including more than 10,000 silver carp being removed from the lower Grand River with an estimated 27 percent decrease in overall silver carp densities. In addition to benefiting our native aquatic communities, this effort is a great example of building partnerships with other agencies. The knowledge gained from this removal effort can aid biologists on future control and management actions of invasive carp in Missouri River tributaries.



Missouri land previously occupied by feral hogs. During 2023, the partnership removed 7,885 hogs from the landscape, assisted 660 landowners, and scouted more than 3.8 million acres. In addition to on-the-ground operations, the partnership placed equipment at Soil and Water Conservation District offices for landowners to use in areas with high feral hog activity; distributed mail-out landowner surveys to collect information regarding feral hog damage, mitigation, and removal efforts; and conducted landowner and community outreach activities throughout the southern portion of the state.

Resource Management Training

The Resource Management Training Program provides MDC employees with learning opportunities to increase professional development on topics mainly related to aquatic and terrestrial natural communities, fisheries, forestry, wildlife, and fire management. More than 750 MDC employees and employees from partner organizations attended nearly 50 classes on topics such as stream management, water quality monitoring, forest soils, fire management, GIS for resource managers, implementation of our tiered approach to habitat management, agricultural crops, wildlife conflicts, glade and woodland management, forest soils, fire management, natural communities, bird ID, aquatic plant ID, forest health, native Missouri bees, and more. Other highlights include partnering with the Boone and Crockett Club to train 30 employees to become Boone and Crockett and Pope and Young scorers. We also partnered with Auburn University's Parasite and Disease Laboratory staff to offer two Fish Health and Disease workshops.

These training opportunities provide staff and partners with the tools to implement on-the-ground management of our fish, forest, and wildlife resources.

A Resource Management Training Conference was held to provide employees from across resource management disciplines the opportunity to hone their skills, learn from other disciplines, and network across branch and regional lines.

The agency also has a multi-disciplinary Training and Development Working Group responsible for providing guidance and direction for continuous

employee development to department staff statewide. This group finalized their team charter, developed program objectives, and is working towards a standardized post-workshop training evaluation to better collect information on and assess how we as an agency are developing our staff.



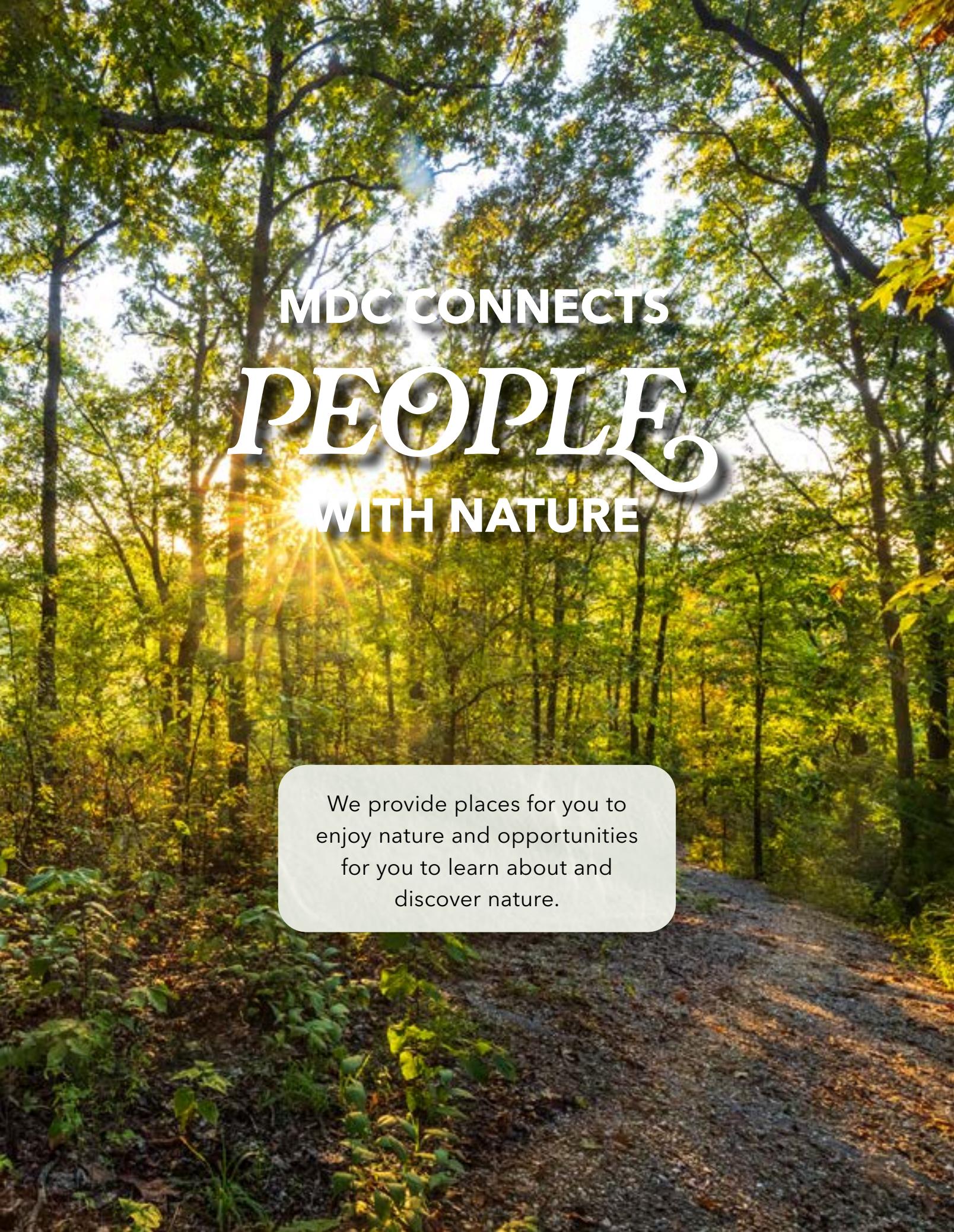
Modification to Turkey Hunting Season

MDC conducted a review of the spring and fall turkey hunting seasons, which included a hunter survey and open public comments during the fall of 2023. The Conservation Commission approved MDC's recommendation for changing the 1 p.m. daily closure on private land during the spring season to sunset. Although there is potential for an increase in gobbler harvest (estimated to be less than 10 percent), the goal is to provide more opportunity for those who don't yet hunt or are limited by other commitments. The Conservation Commission also approved MDC's recommendation for modification to the fall turkey hunting permits. This change combines turkey permits into a single permit and functionally reduces the fall bag limit from four to two turkeys of either sex. This modification is a balance of management of the turkey population, opportunity, and public input.

CWD Management, Deer Season Regulation Changes

To adapt to the changing status of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Missouri, MDC's CWD Surveillance and Management Plan was revised in 2022. The original plan was developed after detecting the first case of the disease in the state in 2010, then revised in 2015. In addition, a CWD Strategic Initiative has been created to enhance and advance the CWD surveillance and management program. For example, a pilot study took place in fall 2024 to evaluate the ability of hunter harvest to achieve removal goals in CWD core areas during the deer hunting season, thus creating efficiencies in our management efforts. Other objectives include increasing our statewide surveillance efforts by developing county-level CWD surveillance goals, improving communications about CWD to ensure effective outreach and engagement, and conducting research to evaluate the factors that influence the success of targeted removal and help inform future CWD management efforts.

To help keep deer numbers at desirable levels and to help minimize the spread of CWD, there were several regulation changes implemented during the 2023 deer season. These included a new early antlerless portion of firearms deer season in 100 counties, a new CWD portion of firearms deer season in the 52 CWD Management Zone counties, and an increase from two to four firearms antlerless permits in most counties. These changes contributed to a record total harvest during the 2023 deer season of 326,448 deer and a record harvest of antlered bucks (147,850). The season was also the first year in a decade that hunters harvested more does than antlered bucks, which is significant given the need to increase antlerless harvest in most counties to stabilize Missouri's growing deer population. Also, during FY24, MDC began the process of revising its 10-year White-tailed Deer Management Plan, which will be completed early in FY25.

A photograph of a forest with sunlight streaming through the leaves, creating a bright, radial effect.

MDC CONNECTS PEOPLE WITH NATURE

We provide places for you to enjoy nature and opportunities for you to learn about and discover nature.

MDC manages approximately 1,000 conservation areas that provide places for people to connect with nature in a variety of ways.

This includes nearly 450 general conservation areas that offer nearly 100 natural areas managed as examples of the many natural communities present throughout the state such as grasslands, woodlands, forests, and glades. There are also more

than 300 accesses scattered across the state to help people enjoy the different types of freshwater resources available to Missourians and visitors alike. From hunting, fishing, birdwatching, bicycling, hiking, floating, camping, horseback riding, or just about any other outdoor activity, there is an area managed by MDC that is awaiting a new or continued adventure.

St. Louis Green Jobs Training Program

In partnership with Employment Connection of St. Louis, The Nature Conservancy, and Mysun Foundation, MDC recently implemented the second cohort of the St. Louis Green Jobs Training Program.

The seven-week Green Jobs program is anchored in the Roots of Success curriculum, an empowering environmental literacy and job training program that prepares youth and adults to access jobs and career pathways in environmental fields and improve environmental and social conditions in their communities. Trainees also attend the World of Work program, which prepares individuals for interviewing and helps increase their skills to gain employment. After completing the course, a dedicated career specialist assists trainees with job leads, preparation, interviews, and placement. Trainees also receive certifications in occupational safety and CPR/first aid.

A key component of the program is the connection with partner organizations throughout the curriculum. MDC worked with project partners to organize 14 work/field days, all with different organizations that offer employment opportunities. In addition to MDC, the cohort worked with the City of St. Louis, Beyond Housing, AmeriCorps, Great Rivers Greenway, Missouri Botanical Garden, and several other community-based organizations. During the workdays, the crew planted trees, controlled invasive species, collected seed, performed stormwater maintenance, and learned about community conservation best practices.

Build Trybe Conservation Landscape Program

One of MDC's community conservation efforts is focused on training a workforce to eventually produce more conservation land stewards in Missouri. Through a collaboration with Cornerstones of Care, the Build Trybe Conservation Landscape Program was developed in partnership with MDC. The initiative has already resulted in the hiring and training of eight young adults from local foster care and other underrepresented populations. These youth have engaged in various in-the-field educational activities, including removing invasive honeysuckle at the Heartland Overlook Preserve, beautifying the Ozanam and Gillis campuses with native plantings, working on the Kessler Park trails with Jerusalem Farm, planting trees at the Ivanhoe Farmer's Market with Kansas City Community Gardens, planting seeds at KC Farm School, sorting recycling at Red Bridge Recycling Center, and even kayaking on the Blue River with Heartland Conservation Alliance to explore the water and the area.

To date, three participants have successfully graduated, including one who has already secured employment with an environmental and social justice nonprofit in Kansas City, while the other two continue to work with Cornerstones of Care to secure their first conservation jobs. The program is ongoing and continues to accept new participants, with more graduations anticipated in the coming months. This is just one example of an outstanding partnership that resulted from the department's community conservation efforts, with more collaborations underway.



Educating the Public about Nature and the Outdoors

MDC provided more than 6,000 nature-based education programs to approximately 340,000 citizens last year. Staff intentionally sought out new audiences in FY24; approximately 37 percent of program attendees reported they had never participated in an MDC-led program. Programs are offered virtually and in-person at nature centers, interpretive centers, and ranges in partnership with communities. The topics of these programs vary significantly, including native plants, archery, fishing, habitat management, kayaking, hunting, shooting sports, and much more.



37% of FY24 program attendees reported they had never participated in an MDC-led program.

Partnering to Promote the Health of Humans, Animals, and the Environment

In alignment with the wisdom illustrated through conservation pioneer Aldo Leopold's land ethic, MDC continues to embrace One Health principles — that the health of humans, animals, and the environment are all important individually and are interconnected to the health of one another. For example, MDC partnered with the Missouri Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Missouri Child Psychiatry Access Project to host a series of continuing medical education seminars across the state at MDC nature centers. The seminars provided an opportunity for physicians to connect the value nature provides to their professional practice. You can find more information about the health benefits of nature online at research.mdc.mo.gov.

Introducing an Online Application for Special Use Permits

Some activities on MDC conservation areas (including groups of more than 10 people camping, horseback riding, bicycling, and using shooting ranges) require a special use permit. Traditionally handled with a paper form, MDC transitioned to an easier online application in July 2023. Learn more and apply online at mdc.mo.gov/SpecialUsePermit.

Engaging Missourians through Community Conservation

Community conservation is the process of engaging local governments, citizens, and private organizations within municipalities and adjacent developing areas to connect people with nature; raise awareness of the community benefits provided by healthy fish, forest, and wildlife resources; and promote conservation of these resources through technical assistance encouraging development practices that protect native fish, forest, and wildlife diversity.

Recruiting, Retaining, and Reactivating Missouri's Hunters and Anglers

MDC has committed to the future of hunting, trapping, fishing, and recreational shooting by recruiting, retaining, and reactivating (R3) outdoor enthusiasts around the state. For the first time in three years, Missouri saw an increase in hunting participation. Efforts to increase participation include outreach initiatives, studies focused on simplification of hunting and angling regulations, and evaluations of R3 educational programs to ascertain efficacy.

Funding Outdoor Recreation for All Missourians

MDC's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Grant is a reimbursement-based grant program for enhancing public access and opportunities for citizen engagement in conservation-related outdoor recreation through the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure. As a result of these cooperative efforts, three new shooting ranges opened. Archery ranges in both Macon and Scott City are providing safe, convenient opportunities for archers to hone their craft, while a firearms range in Campbell allows for rifle, pistol, and trap shooting. Additionally, an area in north Springfield now has an accessible trail where such opportunity has not traditionally existed thanks to a partnership with a local nonprofit and church. And an education pavilion now sits at a highly used trailhead in Kirksville where residents, guests, and students alike can access and learn more about the outdoors thanks to a partnership with a nonprofit formed by a group of passionate outdoor enthusiasts who desire greater use of Missouri trails.

Providing Learning Opportunities for Students

Curriculum

MDC's partnership with Missouri's public and private schools has grown to more than 2,700 classrooms in 1,312 schools, or approximately 44 percent of Missouri schools. MDC provides a suite of nature-based curricula, teaching supplies, and transportation grants, allowing schools to connect students to nature while addressing academic standards. The recently revised kindergarten, first, and second grade Discover Nature Schools curriculum was designed to meet state and national science standards in physical, earth and space, life, and engineering sciences while exploring Missouri-focused conservation topics. The new kindergarten and first grade curriculum was adopted by over 400 classrooms in the first year.

MoNASP

The Missouri Archery in the Schools Program (MoNASP) has been adopted by over 535 schools, with the most recent state tournament drawing approximately 5,000 student archers from more than 200 schools. MoNASP helps build stronger, more confident, and accomplished kids while teaching young people the basics of archery in school. In the past year, 12 Missouri archers received scholarships totaling \$40,000 from the Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation and MoNASP. Many went on to national competitions, and several seniors are being recruited with additional scholarships to schools that have or are creating collegiate archery teams.

Hunter Education

Last year more than 27,000 students earned their hunter education certification. Of those, more than 7,000 students earned their certification in one of the 242 schools using the curriculum in the classroom. Hunter education focuses on ensuring students are responsible and safe hunters, while also helping students understand the fundamentals of wildlife management.



Discover Nature — Fishing

Discover Nature — Fishing (DNF) provides curriculum, teaching supplies, and transportation grants to participating schools. Currently, 183 schools are using the DNF curriculum. MDC strives to get students hooked on fishing so they can enjoy this life skill with family and friends for years to come.

Show-Me Snails

The Show-Me Snails project kicked off its fifth year of volunteer monitoring to collect aquatic snails for identification. This ongoing project will help expand existing snail distribution records and inform future water-quality criteria for the state of Missouri. Last year, 57 Stream Team volunteers registered to help with Show-Me Snails, and 155 aquatic snail samples were submitted to MDC for identification.

Building Conservation Volunteers and Citizen Scientists

Volunteers at MDC's interpretive sites, nature centers, and staffed shooting ranges contributed more than 40,000 hours of service to conservation. These volunteers assisted with special events, school and public programs, visitor relations, animal care, and area maintenance. Volunteers work with department staff to make the visitors' experience at these facilities educational, enjoyable, and memorable. Volunteer hunting and fishing education instructors contributed more than 9,500 hours to connect Missourians to the outdoor pursuits of hunting and fishing. In addition to teaching people new skills, these volunteers help instill a conservation ethic and an understanding of natural resource management in their students.

Participants who are part of MDC's affiliated volunteer programs with partner organizations have an opportunity to work on a variety of citizen science projects with communities around the state, including programs such as Missouri Stream Team, the Master Naturalist Program, and the Missouri Forestkeepers Network.

OVER 27,000

HUNTER EDUCATION CERTIFICATES
EARNED BY MISSOURI STUDENTS

5,000

STUDENT ARCHERS IN
THE STATE TOURNAMENT

44%

OF MISSOURI SCHOOLS
PARTNER WITH MDC

Missouri Stream Team

The Missouri Stream Team program educates Missourians on the nature and quality of the state's streams and how to take care of them through volunteerism. Stream Team volunteers serve as stewards for Missouri's 110,000 miles of flowing water and do hands-on projects, such as litter pickups, water-quality monitoring, storm drain stenciling, and streamside tree planting. The program is a partnership between MDC, the Conservation Federation of Missouri, and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

This past year, teams throughout the state dedicated 53,466 service hours for a variety of activities. These service hours included 39 habitat improvement projects, the planting of 395 trees for water-quality improvement, 308 water-quality monitoring trips, and the removal of 187 tons of trash from Missouri waterways.

During the past year, the Stream Team program partnered with Beyond Housing, Greenway Network, Greenwood Cemetery, Spanish Lake Clean and Green, Missouri American Water, and residents to clean up trash and debris in the North St. Louis communities of Castlepoint, Spanish Lake, Wellston, and Pine Lawn. A total of 256 tires, 975 pounds of metal, and 18 tons of trash were removed from St. Louis streams because of these efforts.

Missouri Master Naturalist Program

The Missouri Master Naturalist program is sponsored and jointly administered by MDC and University of Missouri Extension. As a partnership program, Master Naturalist is committed to growing and sustaining an equitable, diverse, and inclusive learning and working environment to engage Missourians in the stewardship of our state's natural resources through science-based education and volunteer community service. The program aims to improve public understanding of natural resources ecology and management by developing a pool of local knowledge that can be used to enhance education efforts within local communities. A second goal is to enhance existing natural resources education and outreach activities by providing natural resources training at the local level, thereby developing a team of dedicated and informed volunteers.

With 12 chapters and 855 volunteers statewide, Missouri Master Naturalist Program participants partnered with 135 local organizations and provided over 71,000 hours of volunteer community service during the past year. Most chapters participated in seed collections and native plantings with partner organizations in their local communities. Of special mention is the Osage Trails Chapter that collected 93 pounds of seeds in partnership with Dunn Ranch. All chapters contributed to education and outreach. Hannibal's Mississippi Hills Chapter provided over two dozen guided educational hikes for their communities.

Chapters were highly active with citizen science projects. Thirty Master Naturalists assisted with MDC's chronic wasting disease surveillance. Volunteers also assisted with MDC's Eagle Watch Program, bat counts, and herp surveys. The newest MDC citizen science addition this year is Sturgeon Watch. For Sturgeon Watch, volunteers from St. Charles' Confluence Chapter, St. Louis' Great Rivers Chapter, and Washington's Miramigoua Chapter are measuring lake sturgeon that are observed spawning along the Mississippi River. Other citizen science service activities included Audubon's Christmas Bird Count, Missouri Stream Team, and the Bumble Bee Atlas

Missouri Forestkeepers Network

The Missouri Forestkeepers Network is an opportunity for all Missourians — urban and rural — to get involved in monitoring and improving the health of Missouri's forests. The network's mission is to develop a network of informed citizens working to conserve, sustain, and enhance Missouri's urban and rural forest resources through volunteerism, advocacy, and management. Through volunteer and community science efforts, network members can track the health of our state's forests and care for the trees that shelter and shape us. The program is a joint effort of MDC and Forest ReLeaf of Missouri.

With more than 3,130 members, network participants contributed approximately 9,000 hours planting, seed collecting, and monitoring Missouri forests in the past year. Members learned about the challenges and processes of seed collection through a visit to the George O. White State Forest Nursery. This experience featured a workshop on collecting and processing seed as well as a tour of the state nursery grounds and facilities. Members also launched a witch hazel bloom study, worked locally to remove invasive plants, and cared for trees in their backyards and farms. Members' efforts assure Missouri's forests continue to grow and stay healthy.



187 TONS

OF TRASH REMOVED FROM
MISSOURI WATERWAYS

855

MASTER NATURALIST
VOLUNTEERS

OVER 3,130

MEMBERS IN THE MISSOURI
FORESTKEEPERS NETWORK

A photograph of a young boy fishing from a dock at sunset. He is holding a fishing rod with a small fish on the hook. He is wearing a blue t-shirt with a graphic on the back and a baseball cap. The background shows a calm lake with the sun setting in the distance.

MDC MAINTAINS PUBLIC TRUST

We want you to be confident the finances dedicated to Missouri conservation are used wisely, and decisions concerning Missouri's fish, forests, and wildlife are guided by the best available science.

Performance Excellence

MDC is on the journey to performance excellence. Using best practices in the areas of leadership, strategy, customer, data and information, workforce, and operations set in the Malcolm Baldrige Performance Excellence framework, MDC responded to a series of questions that describe the processes and results for each of the categories. MDC received a site visit in December 2023 where a team of examiners interviewed a series of employees that work directly with the processes to validate MDC's performance in the categories. In June 2024, MDC was recognized for its progress through the regional program sponsored by the Quality Texas Foundation.

Design for the Future

MDC has a revised Design for the Future Strategic Plan. With the continued focus on the three goals — Take Care of Nature, Connect People with Nature, and Maintain Public Trust — MDC has further defined strategic priorities and initiatives that align with the goals and outcomes.

New Leadership

With Director Sara Parker Pauley's retirement at the end of May 2024, MDC continues to develop and promote internal leaders. The Conservation Commission named Jason Sumners as the new department director, effective June 1, 2024. Andrew Bond was named as the new deputy of business and operations and Laura Conlee as the new deputy of resource management.

Trust in MDC

Ongoing survey efforts with Missourians indicate a continuous trend of high-level public trust in MDC, with three-quarters indicating they agree they can trust in the department.

Employee Retention

MDC invests in its team and remains an employer of choice with an annual employee retention rate of better than 94 percent.

MDC REMAINS AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE WITH AN ANNUAL EMPLOYEE RETENTION RATE OF BETTER THAN 94 PERCENT.



Missouri's conservation agents are some of our most recognized employees. Assigned to counties throughout the state, agents serve as local representatives of the department and the Conservation Commission. They have a vast knowledge of the department, which enables them to enforce the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*, serve as local contacts, and provide needed educational programs in our communities.